

Louisville and Nashville Railroad,
Union Station
1000 West Broadway
Louisville
Jefferson County
Kentucky

HABS No. KY-152

HABS,
KY,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOUISVILLE AND NASHVILLE RAILROAD,
UNION STATION

HABS No. KY-152

Location: 1000 West Broadway, Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky.

Present Owner and Occupant: Transit Authority of River City.

Significance: Located at the confluence of major east, west, north, and south rail lines, Union Station is one of the largest and finest examples of late Richardsonian Romanesque architecture in Kentucky.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1876; 1889-1891. Construction first began on the site for a railroad station in 1876, but was soon abandoned. Construction was resumed in August of 1889 utilizing and enlarging the previous foundations. The building was formally opened on September 7, 1891 by the arrival of the first train at 7:37 a.m. Total cost amounted to \$310,056. At its opening it was the largest station in the south and the second largest in the west, next to Chicago.
2. Architect: F.W. Mowbray. He was born in Leicest, England in 1848. At the age of 16 in 1864 he entered into the study of architecture. Following his apprenticeship and some early practice in England, he emigrated to Philadelphia, arriving in 1872, where he quickly established a thriving business. From 1874-1876 he served as principal assistant architect of the Centennial Exposition. Following the Exposition's closing he moved to New York in 1877 where he began a private practice. He then became the chief assistant architect of the Manhattan Elevated Railway Company. Work with the U.S. Rolling Stock Company followed. He then accepted the position of chief assistant architect of the New York, West Shore, and Buffalo Railroad. Following that he was appointed as chief assistant architect of the Pennsylvania Railroad, later becoming chief architect. The position of chief architect for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad then opened and he accepted it. His primary responsibility with the Louisville and Nashville Railroad lay in the design and construction of the railroad station for Louisville, which he modeled after Union Station in Indianapolis. Following completion of the Louisville station he resigned his position and entered private practice in Louisville. He was also known for his ecclesiastical designs.

Henry Wolters, architect of the Tyler Block, has been credited with the design of Union Station. It is known that he executed the design for Union Station in Birmingham, Alabama for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad in 1887. Its design bears virtually no resemblance to Union Station in Louisville. If he worked on the Louisville station it was probably in a secondary capacity or it is conceivable that he might have directed plans for its reconstruction in 1905.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Union Station is located on lot 1 of block 29-L, bounded by Tenth, Eleventh, Broadway and Maple Streets in the city of Louisville. The following references tracing the title of this lot and the portion allotted to the station are found in the Jefferson County, Kentucky Deed Books:

1873 Deed, April 21, 1873, recorded in Deed Book 170, page 525. W.H. Duhaney and Margaret Duhaney sold a 140'x249' lot on West Broadway 70 feet west of Tenth Street to the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company for \$17,500.

1873 Deed, April 21, 1873, recorded in Deed Book 170, page 530. George W. Norton and Martha H. Norton and William F. Norton and Ann E. Norton sold a 70'x 240' lot at the southwest corner of Tenth and Broadway Streets to the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company for \$4,000.

1978 Louisville and Railroad Company sold Union Station to Transit Authority of River City.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

R. Montfort.....chief engineer in charge of construction
Jacob F. Merriwether.....general contractor
Belknap and Dumesnil Stone Company.....stone

5. Original plans and construction: Original drawings signed by Mowbray exist in the files of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company headquarters next to Union Station. However, the number and condition of these drawings is presently unknown as access to them is severely limited. Early accounts about the station refer to a magnificent glass "dome" over the waiting room. This "dome" was, in actuality, stained glass vaulting which was virtually identical to the present vaulting.

6. Alterations and additions:

1905 On Monday night, July 17, 1905, a tremendous fire of unknown cause broke out in the records storage room in the third floor northwest tower and completely destroyed the interior of the station. The southeast corner tower collapsed and the front wall buckled. After several weeks of discussion, it was decided to reconstruct the station as it had been. This included replacing the timber structural system rather than using a steel system which was felt to be too heavy for the weakened walls to support. The Selden-Breck Construction Company of St. Louis was general contractor for the job and the work was supervised by R.M. Cunningham. All materials and sub-contractors were of local origin except for those of the stained glass and the decorative elements. The building was virtually reconstructed as before with the exception of some changes made in the plans for offices on the third floor and the installation of new electrical fixtures. The station reopened Sunday December 3, 1905 after an amazingly short period of construction. Total cost of reconstruction was \$125,000.

In 1937 extensive repairs were necessitated on the main floor and basement because of the tremendous flood of that year.

During the 1960s new ticket and baggage offices were built out into the waiting room on the east side.

In 1978, when the building was sold to Transit Authority of River City, the tracks and trainsheds to the south and west of the station were removed. The building now serves as the headquarters of the Transit Authority of River City.

- B. Historical Context: Union Station served as the great portal to the city of Louisville from its opening through the first half of the 20th century. Virtually every important visitor to the city passed through its waiting room. These included numerous Presidents and presidential candidates. One of the earliest visitors of note was Sarah Bernhardt, the famous actress, who arrived from Indianapolis on October 19, 1891.

It was during construction that William Hall fell to his death from scaffolding on June 26, 1890. Another death occurred almost fifteen years later when George Warner shot and killed Pulaski Leeds in the third floor records storage room under the northwest tower that was later to become the scene of the beginning of the disastrous fire.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General description:

The stone Richardsonian Romanesque building is highlighted by a frontispiece with arches containing circular stained glass windows and flanking corbeled corner shafts resembling miniature bartizans. Pyramidal-roofed towers flank the building on north and south elevations; the east tower on the north (front) elevation contains a clock on each of its four sides. A canopy shelters the front entrance. Interesting animal grotesques on top of the corner shafts give further character to the building. Some of the rectangular windows have arches. The plan of the rear elevation is similar to that of the front elevation, with the exception of fewer windows. The interior is one open space, and its only noteworthy features are the stained glass windows, the vaulted ceiling and the second floor balconies.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Plans located within the file of the Louisville and Nashville Headquarters, 900 West Broadway, Louisville, Kentucky.

B. Early Views:

Exterior view at midway point of erection in "Two New Depots," Courier-Journal, October 19, 1890.

View of waiting room and view of exterior in "Formally Opened," Louisville Post, September 7, 1891.

Exterior photograph in Louisville of Today, Consolidated Illustrating Company, Louisville, Kentucky, 1895.

Exterior photograph in Art Work of Louisville, Kentucky, Charles Madison Co., 1897, vol. 8.

Exterior photograph following fire in "Only Fire-Scarred Walls Remain," Louisville Times, July 18, 1905.

Interior photograph following fire in "Ruins Are to be Replaced By An Imposing Depot," Louisville Herald, July 19, 1905.

"Scene Showing Carpenters Erecting Temporary Depot," Louisville Herald, July 19, 1905.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books located in the County Clerk's Office, Jefferson County Courthouse, Louisville, Kentucky.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Klein, Maury. History of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. New York: Macmillan Co., 1972.

Louisville and its Resources, A Souvenir of the Louisville Post. Louisville Post, 1892.

Louisville and Nashville Railroad 39th Annual Report, 1889-1890. Louisville: John P. Morton and Company, 1890.

Newspaper clippings:

"Two New Depots," Courier-Journal, October 19, 1890.

"The Union Depot," Louisville Commercial, September 7, 1891.

"Formally Opened," Louisville Post, September 7, 1891.

"F.W. Mowbray Resigns," Courier-Journal, September 8, 1891.

"Open for Business," Louisville Commercial, September 8, 1891.

"In Ruins," Courier-Journal, July 18, 1905.

"Accidents Numerous, But Not Serious", Courier-Journal, July 18, 1905.

"Practically Certain to Rebuild at Once," Courier-Journal, July 18, 1905.

"Danger Forgotten by Spectators," Courier-Journal, July 18, 1905.

"Union Depot for Louisville," Evening Post, July 18, 1905.

"Thousands Saw Flames Destroy Union Station," Evening Post, July 18, 1905.

"Handsome Terminal Is In Ruins, Valuable Records Ruined," Louisville Herald, July 18, 1905.

"Will Be Rebuilt Without Unnecessary Delay," Louisville Times, July 18, 1905.

"The Origin of Fire Now Puzzling L. & N. Officials," Courier-Journal, July 19, 1905.

"To Rebuilt Union Station on the Present Site," Courier-Journal, July 19, 1905.

"New Station in Former Location," Evening Post, July 19, 1905.

"Ruins Are to be Replaced by An Imposing Depot," Louisville Herald, July 19, 1905.

"Board of Trade Favors Grand Union Station," Louisville Herald, July 20, 1905.

"L. and N. Stands With Open Doors," Louisville Times, July 20, 1905.

"Probing Into Cause of Tenth Street Station Fire," Courier-Journal, July 21, 1905.

"Key to Union Depot," Courier-Journal, July 21, 1905.

"Coat Burns, but Money Is Saved," Courier-Journal, July 21, 1905.

"Union Station Talk Less Enthusiastic," Louisville Times, July 21, 1905.

"Roads Can Save Millions by Building Union Station Now," Evening Post, July 22, 1905.

"Depot Committee Appointed," Courier-Journal, July 23, 1905.

"For Union Station," Evening Post, July 25, 1905.

"To Secure Station," Evening Post, July 27, 1905.

"Promise Station In Four Months," Evening Post, July 27, 1905.

"To Be Opened Sunday," Evening Post, December 2, 1905.

"Opens Today," Courier-Journal, December 3, 1905.

"L. and N. Remodeled Depot Ready for Use of the Public Today," Louisville Herald, December 3, 1905.

Prepared by: David Arbogast
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
August 1974

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance of Louisville and Jefferson County, Inc. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1974 at the HABS Field Office in Louisville by Prof. John Haggard, (Syracuse University), Project Supervisor; David Arbogast (Columbia University), Project Historian; Mary Oehrlein, Project Foreman; Bayer Lee (City College of New York), Architect; and Mary M. Herd (University of Tennessee) and Charles Raith (University of Cincinnati), student assistant architects. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written descriptive data in the spring of 1981, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher took the photographs of the structures in 1979.

ADDENDUM TO
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